

## Empowerment and Innovation of Peasants in Nisam District, Aceh Utara

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### Abstract

*This research was conducted to examine the impact of empowering and fostering innovation of peasants as an activity that summarizes the values to build a new paradigm in agricultural development. The role of the agricultural sector is very strategic, not only in order to achieve food self-sufficiency but also in order to expand non-oil and gas foreign exchange sources. The purpose of this study is to see the impact of the strategy and pattern of relations between the Aceh Community Empowerment Institution (LPMA) in implementing the empowerment program and fostering farmer innovation in Nisam District, North Aceh Regency. The method used in this study is a qualitative method with data collection techniques through interviews, observation and documentation. The phenomenon of poverty for the people in Nisam District, North Aceh generally comes from the agricultural sector due to the lack of support for knowledge and business capital. This empowerment activity is carried out by the Aceh Community Empowerment Institute (LPMA), a non-governmental organization. Research shows that the optimization of empowerment and innovation carried out by LPMA has contributed to increasing community empowerment and also contributed to business partnerships for poor farmers to increase community empowerment.*

### Keywords

Empowerment; Aceh; Nisam; fostering innovation; peasant; farmer



## I. Introduction

The phenomenon of poverty for rural communities generally comes from the agricultural sector is a common symptom. Poverty is a reality inherent in the majority of rural farming communities, causing government efforts to appear to have not been implemented perfectly. Therefore, referring to the new paradigm of development, which is "people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable", efforts to empower and foster community innovation are increasingly becoming a necessity in every development effort. Indonesia is known for its biological wealth and natural resources (SDA) and with this wealth Indonesia is destined to be a suitable country in the field of agricultural development (Totok Mardikanto and Poerwako Soebianto, 2012). The agricultural sector is still one of the priorities that gets the government's attention, because the growth and development of the agricultural sector is one of the keys to national development (Saheb, Slamet and Zuber, 2018).

Suharto (2014) defines empowerment as a process and a goal. As a process, empowerment is a series of activities to strengthen the power or empowerment of weak groups in society, including individuals who experience poverty problems. As a goal, empowerment refers to the state or result to be achieved by a social change, namely a community that is empowered, has power or has the knowledge and ability to fulfill their physical, economic and social needs, such as having self-confidence, being able to convey aspirations, have a livelihood, participate in social activities, and are independent in carrying out their life tasks.

When Sukino (2013) said that, agricultural development is largely determined by the Human Resources in it. Increasing competitiveness can be done through two aspects, namely internal factors which include the formation of business groups, HR capabilities, HR development, technology. While external factors include partnership support in capital, government support for Research and Development, interaction with outside parties as well as the role of innovation and partnership capabilities as important factors in increasing competitiveness (Sulistyo, H and Siyamtinah. 2016)

Parson (1994) in Suharto (2010: 63) directs that there are three dimensions of empowerment which refer to a development process starting from individual growth which then develops into a larger social change, then a psychological state which is interpreted by self-confidence, useful and able to control themselves and others, next is the liberation produced by social movements, which starts from the education and politicization of the weak and then involves the collective efforts of these weak people to gain power and change structures. which is still pressing.

One of the government's efforts to support the improvement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the issuance of Law Number 19 of 2003 concerning Government-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) as a form of concern for the economic growth of the community and the social environment of the surrounding community, namely the Partnership and Community Development Program. (Program Kemitraan dan Bina Lingkungan -PKBL) as part of corporate action. The Small Business Partnership Program aims to improve the ability of small businesses to become responsible and independent through support for capital and professional and skilled Human Resources (HR) training so that they can support marketing and business continuity in the future.

North Aceh is an area where the average population makes a living as farmers with a large amount of agricultural land, they must be empowered and fostered to achieve maximum results. Agriculture plays an important role in the overall economy. The role of the agricultural sector is very strategic, not only in order to achieve food self-sufficiency but also in order to expand non-oil and gas foreign exchange sources.

One of the potential agricultural areas is in Nisam District, North Aceh, but because the farmers have not been optimally empowered, so that agriculture there is still lagging behind. The potential of natural resources in Nisam District has good prospects as a promising producer of rice production if the village community is fully aware that agriculture can be used as an asset to be able to promise their future. The potential of natural resources covering ten villages in the Nisam sub-district is directed at agricultural development. However, the results of farming, especially the production of agricultural products such as lowland rice, have not provided many benefits for improving the living standards of the people there. The causes that influence their business activities include mental attitude, capital, market and educational aspects.

Through intensive empowerment and fostering innovation, it will be able to raise the dignity of the farming community in doing business. Lagging behind in agriculture,

farmers who are not yet 'intelligent', mental attitude, capital, markets and educational aspects which then inspired the Aceh Community Empowerment Institute (LPMA) to train 100 poor farmers in Nisam District, North Aceh how to grow rice well. The training was carried out as an effort and success step in empowering farmers to increase production, especially rice. This activity is prioritized for 315 poor families who will receive free assistance (Beritakini.co. 21 January 2018)

As a pioneering NGO, this activity aims to empower and foster innovation of all potentials owned by the community so that they can develop themselves in achieving success regarding improving the living standards of farming communities. In line with the development of the people's capacity in development and the reduction of central government intervention in the regions, development should be directed at changing people's lives for the better. Many efforts have been made to empower them, but have yet to reap satisfactory results. This is caused by limited funding and concern by various parties, so that they are in a condition of backwardness and poverty. Based on the above background, the formulation of the problem in this research are: What are the strategies and patterns of community relations between the poor farmers by the Aceh Community Empowerment Institute (LPMA) and the inhibiting and supporting factors in the implementation of the empowerment and innovation development program?

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Community Development**

Community empowerment is an effort to prepare the community to be able to realize progress, independence and prosperity in an atmosphere of sustainable social justice. Community empowerment is also an effort to improve the dignity of the people whose conditions are having difficulty escaping from the poverty trap. In other words, empowerment is an increase in enabling and self-reliant communities.

According to Sumodiningrat, the main approach in the concept of empowerment is that the community is not made the object of various development projects, but is the subject of its own development efforts. Based on this concept, community empowerment must follow the following approach: First, the effort must be directed. This is popularly called partiality. Second, this program must directly involve or even be implemented by the target community. Third, using a group approach, because alone it is difficult for the poor to solve the problems they face.

In the operationalization process, the idea of empowerment found two tendencies, among others, namely: first, the primary tendency, which is the tendency of the process that gives and transfers part of the strength or ability to the community and individuals to become more empowered. This process is complemented by efforts to build material assets to support the development of their independence through the organization; and second, secondary tendencies, namely tendencies that emphasize the process of providing stimulation, motivating individuals to have abilities of empowerment to determine what their life choices are through a dialogue process (Sumodiningrat, 1999).

Next to the empowerment approach, the process is more likely to enable the implementation of development that humanizes humans. In this view, community involvement in development is more directed to the form of participation, not in the form of mobilization. Community participation in the formulation of the program makes the community not only as consumers of the program, but also as producers because they have been involved in the process of making and formulating it, so that people feel they have

ownership of the program and have a responsibility for its success and have more motivation for its success. participation in the next stage (Soetomo, 2006).

Empowerment is a development strategy that is currently getting great attention from both the government and non-governmental organizations or NGOs. Empowerment comes from the word "power" which means strength and power. Power is not a fixed or stagnant concept, power is changing, dynamic, and created through social relations so that empowerment utilizes the concept of changeable power which initially does not have power over itself then has full power for itself and power that can be expanded. With these two things, power as a basis for empowerment can be made possible (Suharto, 2014: 55). In other words, empowerment is sharing power, namely increasing capacity and assigning authority to parties who have not been empowered (Aminah, 2014: 2-4).

Empowerment is a condition in which an individual or group has the ability to access sources of information, technology, capital and develop skills so that he is able to overcome life problems with his own abilities (Aminah, 2014: 2). In other words, empowerment is the determination of the autonomy possessed by each individual or group to make decisions on their own life without any coercion from outsiders and the development of these skills and needs comes from the resources owned by each individual and group (Hardjanto, 2011: 18). A brief description of the concept of empowerment can be seen from the scheme below:



*Figure 1. Empowerment Concept. Source: excerpted from Anwas, 2014: 49*

From the above scheme, it can be understood that empowerment begins with a state of powerlessness. This helplessness condition causes them to not have the ability to make their own life choices. These oppressive structures and weak groups are then the targets of empowerment. So here empowerment seeks to maximize the effective choices of individuals and groups, in order to increase their power over decisions concerning their personal future. When a person or group has been able to control and rule over his own life or is empowered over his own life, he has reached a powerful state.

## **2.2 The Concept of Participatory Empowerment and Innovation**

According to development planners and observers, empowerment development and innovation fostering of poor peasant is stated as a process of change in society, where poverty will be eliminated and creativity, participation and level of knowledge possessed will be used to utilize existing resources, both human and environmental resources. including sources versus lowland rice in a more productive manner in accordance with the needs, facilities and goods that are really needed by peasants (Bagong Suyanto, 1995). Community development, according to the United Nations (UN) definition, is defined as a process that includes two elements. First, the participation of the community itself in their efforts to improve their standard of living. Second, technical assistance and services from the government aimed at generating initiatives to help oneself and a willingness to help others.

Two key words, namely empowerment (empowerment) and participatory (participatory) recently often appear in agricultural development programs, especially in order to raise the dignity of the farming community. As the ultimate goal, empowerment is a target to be achieved, while participation is a tool to achieve the targeted goal. In other

words, participation is a strategic approach in realizing empowerment. Checkoway (1995) suggests that empowerment can be viewed as a multilevel process, which includes individual involvement, organizational development, and community change. Individual involvement is individual participation in decision making through organizational development forums as a liaison between individuals and communities which in turn will create community change.

Participation becomes very important for the success of a program by considering: (1) for the improvement of development plans in general and specific priorities for a particular activity (project); (2) the program/project cannot be implemented if the activities are not in accordance with the conditions and needs of the community or the visualization is not appropriate; (3) for sustainability (sustainability); and (4) to increase equity or equity (Krishna and Lovel, 1985).

Empirical facts show that research on community empowerment on fostering innovation for poor farmers has had previous research, including discussing community empowerment of organic rice farmers (Galih Pratama Nuranto: 2013), research from Nirzalin and Nulwita Maliati (2017) "agricultural productivity and involution of farmer welfare ( case study in meunasah pinto aceh Utara. Gumoyo Mumpuni ningsih (2012), Empowerment of farmers by extension workers for the development of organic rice farming. The result is a lack of capital, less skilled labor and depending on the season. The threat is that a lot of competition, imports and lack of assistance mockup of the government.

### 2.3 Innovation

Conventionally, the term innovation is defined as a breakthrough related to new products. Birkishaw and Hamel (2008) define that innovation is a broader concept that discusses the application of new ideas, products, or processes. The characteristics of innovation are one of the barriers to innovation, how innovation becomes difficult for farmers to implement. While the research conducted by Indraningsih (2011) explains that the factors that influence the decision of adopter farmers to adopt technology are direct benefits from technology in the form of relative advantages, technological suitability, and farmers' perceptions of the influence of media/interpersonal information, on non-adopter farmers are conformity and the complexity of technology and farmers' perceptions of the influence of media/interpersonal information as a communicative technology provider for farmers. Innovations recommended by the government are usually project, innovations are usually disseminated collectively through farmer groups.

Furthermore, Haleeabadi (2008) proposes two innovation concepts, namely: (1) Innovation and (2) Capacity to innovate. Innovativeness is the notion of being open to new ideas as an aspect of company culture, whereas capacity to innovate is the company's ability to use or implement new ideas, processes, or products successfully. While Trott (2005) provides a classical definition of innovation, which is a broad concept, including the implementation of new ideas, products or processes. Furthermore, it is also explained that innovation is a practice, as well as material that is considered new by the relevant adoption unit. Broadly, innovation is the successful implementation of a creative idea



### III. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach. by using a descriptive approach, namely research that seeks to explain problem solving based on data, the use of this qualitative approach is also to analyze whether the Empowerment of Farmers through the innovation development program carried out by the Aceh Community Empowerment Institute (LPMA) has an impact and is able to meet the target to realize the improvement of food security for poor farmers there is seen from the previous coaching program that existed. The data analysis technique in this study uses an interactive model analysis by Miles and Huberman (2014). Completing the needs of researchers in terms of analyzing the results of the study and to fully answer the problems revealed, it is deemed necessary to take the following steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing.

### IV. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Strategy for Empowerment and Fostering Innovation for Peasants

In essence, empowerment activities for poor farmers are not new because many development efforts in the past related to the context of this empowerment activity have been carried out. The empowerment strategy is also a strengthening of concrete steps, opening access to various opportunities that will make the community more empowered. Furthermore, the strategies implemented by LPMA in empowering peasants, poor farmers in Nisam District include: first, socialization. The strategy for empowering poor farmers is carried out by LPMA starting with socialization, because the socialization process is very influential on the sustainability of the program. In this case, LPMA conducts direct socialization, namely the socialization process is carried out directly to the community, as shown in the following figure;



*Figure 2. LPMA Socializes Empowerment of Peasants*

The picture above explains that the general chairman of LPMA Gumarni and the management of LPMA Aceh Utara are conducting socialization in order to explain the form and objectives of the empowerment program with nine geuchik (village heads) in the

office hall of the Nisam District, North Aceh Regency accompanied by the muspika plus. The socialization explained about LPMA's activity plan in order to provide rice seeds, fertilizers, and medicines needed by poor farmers before going down to the fields.

Second, Seminars and Training, LPMA conducts training and seminars for 100 poor farmers in Nisam Subdistrict, North Aceh Regency, aiming for the success of the LPMA program as an effort and success step for empowerment, seminars and training focus on good rice cultivation procedures to increase crop yields. This perfect fit is in accordance with the main concept of the enabling process in an effort to build power by encouraging, motivating and raising awareness of the potential of the community and efforts to develop it.

Seminar to 100 farmers with a training mechanism that discusses good farming procedures, so that the planned food security improvement program is achieved as expected. Considering that the majority of farmers in Nisam District are traditional food crop farmers who carry out their agricultural activities from generation to generation from their parents. Thus, it needs to be further developed through training and counseling so that they are more capable which in turn will be able to improve the way of processing crops.



*Figure 3. LPMA Seminar and Training for 100 farmers in Nisam. District*

Based on the results of the documentation, it can be seen that, seminars and training are in the form of lectures with material as described above. Third, assistance. Mentoring is carried out by extension workers, the position of extension workers is very strategic in development, especially in making changes to the behavior of the main actors and business actors. This role shows that extension work is a professional job that can only be done by an extension worker who has special expertise. Farmers are the main actors in agricultural production activities, part of the Indonesian people who need to improve their welfare and intelligence through extension activities. With the extension, it is hoped that all agricultural information that develops can be absorbed and accepted by farmers, the more information that is used by farmers, the more effective the extension will be.

At the level of the concept of innovation, the technology created needs to consider the needs of users and the supporting factors so that technological innovations can be adopted quickly and accurately. The facts on the ground show that the adoption of

agricultural technology innovations at the farm level is still relatively low so that the agricultural productivity achieved is not in accordance with the existing potential. This is due to the various perceptions and responses of farmers to these technological innovations.



*Figure 4. Peasants, Farmers and Extension Activities*

Based on the results of the documentation above, describing the activities of farmers and field extension workers as assistants consisting of district extension workers also accompanied by assisted extension workers from the training carried out by LPMA, they are known as inspirational extension workers who themselves are farmers who receive assistance and are trained to develop and maintain foster participation among them in the success of the empowerment program. This inspirator instructor is tasked with assisting starting from how to grow crops, how to take care of them to monitoring the harvests obtained by the farmers concerned.

#### **4.2 Inhibiting and Supporting Factors**

Some things that are very urgent in the activities of empowering peasants (poor farmers) in Nisam District that the authors get include: mental attitude, capital, marketing and others. This is a constraint in addition to the support felt by LPMA in this empowerment activity.

#### **4.3 Socio-Cultural Factors and Peasant Mentality**

Mental attitude is a very urgent obstacle in the lives of peasants (poor farmers) in the nine empowered villages, the farmers are rather difficult to develop independently because they have not been able to change their attitude. When viewed from the level of farmers' welfare at this time, it can be said that it is relatively low where there is a peasants's attitude that seems to be a bit hampering their agriculture. This shows that there are still many people who still maintain tradition and consider tradition to be absolutely irreversible, thus hampering social change in the life of the farmer. Some peasants also have no knowledge and limited access to information and technology. Therefore, the socio-cultural factors and mental attitudes of the peasants and farmers must get attention in an effort to increase their business activities.



#### **4.4 Economic Factors and Business Capital**

Based on the results of observations in the field, it shows that farmers are less interested in the socialization and training activities carried out by LPMA if they have not received definite information in terms of assistance in the form of capital, both fertilizers and other agricultural facilities and the results they have achieved, so it seems rather difficult to implement various newer and more modern agricultural production techniques and methods. Therefore, LPMA makes a solution that farmers who take part in the training should also act as assistants as well as extension workers. So that capital assistance is also right on target. Therefore, community empowerment is a concept that reflects the new paradigm of development, which is "people centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable". poverty and underdevelopment.

This is in accordance with what is played by LPMA that, empowerment of peasants (poor farmers) is to improve the economy and independence and focus on several policies: and counseling (assistance) in agricultural activities. The role of LPMA as a dynamist influences peasants in their agricultural activities, managing farming activities related to the distribution of agricultural assistance, making it easier for the community to obtain the desired assistance.

#### **4.5 Peasants' Education and Resources Factor**

Empowerment of farmers in Nisam District is still somewhat constrained, due to the low level of education of the peasants, the majority of their education is elementary school graduates, so it is not surprising that agricultural production is not highly competitive. With the low level of education of peasants can affect the low productivity and work ethic of peasants in Nisam Sub-district are more traditional sub-system peasants (poor farmers). This means that the farmer only thinks about processing his agricultural products just to meet his needs. The results showed that the education level of peasants and farmers in Nisam District, especially the nine villages that received empowerment from LPMA, mostly had elementary and junior high school education backgrounds.

The problem of the quality of agricultural human resources in Nisam is still very low, their average education is elementary school graduates. The fact shows that some peasants in Nisam still live below the poverty line and are unable to improve their standard of living due to their inability to absorb new technologies. Therefore, efforts to increase empowerment for peasants are through improving the quality of agricultural human resources, namely by facilitating farming by providing formal and non-formal education related to agriculture. For example, regular counseling, optimizing the use of agricultural resources such as agricultural land, natural water, as well as human and animal labor, agricultural diversification, farming management, marketing management and increasing the added value of agricultural production.

In theory, the higher a person's formal education, the easier it is to understand the information received. Mentally, formal education serves to prepare a person to face the challenges of life which is always changing. Mardikanto (2009) states that farmers' education generally affects the way and mindset of farmers in managing farming. The higher a person's education level, the more efficient they work and the more they know how to farm better and more profitably. This is also reinforced that education is one of the facilitating factors in agricultural development, the education factor is one of the factors that can accelerate the change in attitudes of traditional humans to modern humans.

But on the other hand, the government's role as a regulator is policy making, in this case agricultural empowerment activities are actually very clear systems and rules, but the

condition of the people who are still unfamiliar with the rules related to reasoning and technology, hampers the pace of community agricultural empowerment because they see the condition of the community. education and knowledge of the community is still below average. The results of the study, the authors found that some of the peasants (poor farmers) did not have any productive factors except their workforce, then the peasants' land area was narrow, limited access to financial support services, limited access to better information and technology.

It can also be seen from the theory of empowerment itself which means giving power, strength, to those who are less empowered. Empowerment is essentially aimed at helping clients gain power, strength and ability to make decisions and take action, including reducing personal and social barriers to taking action. even a “must” to be more empowered through their own efforts and the accumulation of knowledge, skills and other resources. This discussion is in accordance with the data that the author obtained through interviews with the mukim of Blang Dalam Tunong that the empowerment program through seminars and training by LPMA for poor farmers with low resources has an impact on positive about their efforts, although with low knowledge but get satisfactory results.

#### **4.6 Marketing Factors**

The market is the last key in business development for farming activities, because if there is no market, the production produced by farmers will not provide benefits and contribute to increasing income and welfare for farming families. Therefore, the market will greatly determine the sustainability of the farming business. An unfair and exploitative market structure due to a very weak bargaining position and the inability, weakness or ignorance of the farmers themselves. Peasants in Nisam sub-district do not sell all of their rice yields. Some of it is set aside for the food needs of his family. On average they set aside 10 sacks of rice of various sizes ranging from 10 Kg, 15 Kg, 16 Kg, 25 Kg, even up to 60 Kg for the needs of the next few months. This has been their habit since they started to become peasants and raise families. If the harvest does not meet expectations, they choose not to sell their agricultural produce to the market. In addition to setting aside agricultural products for family needs, the majority of them receive assistance for poor rice (Raskin) from the government as much as 4 kg per household.

Macro level theory, understanding this macro level approach in empowerment efforts is to increase food security. Seeing Nisam District as one of the agriculture-based sub-districts, empowerment must be carried out through a strategy, namely the food security strategy. The food security strategy here consists of three subsystems, namely first, food availability (products of production), The direction of empowerment for poor farming communities needs to be carried out with the importance of agribusiness. namely developing agriculture and agro-industry or industries that process agricultural products and the services that support them. Farmer empowerment basically means placing farmers as the basic force for economic development, reviving various community economic institutions to be compiled and strengthened so that they can act as a locomotive for progress. The people's economy will be built if the synergistic relationship of various social and economic institutions in the community is developed towards the formation of a people's economic network.

Second, food distribution (market). The results also show that, marketing of production is the last key in business development for farming activities, because if there is no market, the production produced by peasants will not provide benefits and contribute to increasing income and welfare for farming families. Therefore, the market will greatly

determine the sustainability of the farming business. The marketing problem in Nisam sub-district is still quite good and can be reached by the farming community, unless there is an obstacle to the decline in the unit price of production so that it will greatly disrupt business continuity.

The last is the supporting factor. The thing that stands out the most from the success of the empowerment is the field inspirational extension workers from among the peasants themselves. Inspirational extension agents influence the attitude of farmers in empowering and planting seeds assisted by IF8 from LPMA. Inspirational extension workers also work in terms of conveying information on methods including providing assistance, information on technology, fertilizers, and so on. Capital assistance provided to farmers can minimize the costs that will be incurred by farmers for the production costs of the farming business which is only part of the initial capital.

Then the next support factor is the environment where the empowerment is carried out, the results of the author's interview with the head of LPMA explain that there is no political nuance that affects it at all, because from the village government to the provincial government, it is very supportive of this empowerment activity. It is clear that the empowerment of LPMA is based on a good concept starting from socialization and to assistance in getting results except in terms of marketing, LPMA is no longer involved.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the problems and results of the discussion in the previous description, the author can describe the conclusion that empowerment for peasants carried out by LPMA in Nisam District, North Aceh as follows: The empowerment strategy carried out by LPMA has been able to encourage the growth and development of self-reliance of poor farmers in Sembilan Gampong to better level. The socialization of programs, seminars and training has changed the land cultivation system that used to have a traditional pattern to a modern one. The provision of business capital has also been able to minimize the impact of the inability they have experienced so far, in the form of costs incurred by peasants in starting their production as initial capital. Assistance to farmers from all stages of agricultural activity, produces visible results from the productivity that farmers get during harvest.

Mental attitude, aspects of capital, peasants' education level and marketing of agricultural products are still the inhibiting factors in empowering poor farmers in Nisam sub-district, but the author does not get environmental factors at all. In the mental attitude factor, farming activities are still traditional with the use of simple technology. Constraints in the issue of capital also hindered in terms of business development, most of the peasants. poor farmers did not get maximum assistance from the government such as the provision of credit packages. In addition, the marketing of new products can be used in the local market, while for wider market access there is still a problem with the impartiality of the resulting price. While in the field of education, in general, village farmers in the Nisam sub-district from 9 villages that were assisted by LPMA still have the highest educational background of elementary school only at the junior high school level. The lack of education level more or less affects the sustainability of farming activities in the empowerment. Government support at the sub-district level and the full participation of Gampong apparatus are the most prominent supporting factors for the success of this empowerment and good assistance by extension workers.

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